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PHASE ONE OF A PROJECT TO PRODUCE A REFERENCE GRAMMAR OF TAMIL. FINAL REPORT.

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This final report is a brief outline of Phase One in the preparation of a comprehensive reference grammar of Tamil, based on the results of recent linguistic theory and analytic techniques, and designed to be "accessible" to any student of Tamil. The studies which have resulted from Phase One are "strictly preliminary" to a larger study of the Tamil language. Part I, the phonology section, is a description of the segmental phonology of two dialects, the Standard Colloquial (unmarked for caste and region), and a Brahmin caste dialect of Madras. The segmental phonology is followed by Part II, a detailed discussion of sandhi, morphophonemics, and the relationships that obtain between the dialect phonologies and the traditional Tamil writing system. The author states that his later, larger work would include a detailed disucssion of the sociolinguistics of Tamil dialects, and fully explore the implications of the writing system. Tables of contents for Parts I and II are included in this description. (AMM)

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FINAL REPORT

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PHASE ONE OF A PROJECT TO PRODUCE A REFERENCE GRAMMAR OF TAMIL

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BACKGROUND

The importance of Tamil for any balanced study of Indian civilization, both classical and modern, is beginning to be increasingly recognized. Courses and research in Tamil language and culture are being undertaken in several centers in the United States, in European countries like England, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, as well as in Asian countries like Malaysia and Japan. A UNESCO-sponsored International Institute of Tamil Research is presently projected for Madras.

Adequate modern materials for the study of Tamil as a foreign language are woefully lacking, although various efforts are in progress. Probably the most urgently needed are (a) teaching materials prepared on modern linguistic lines for colloquial as well as literary Tamil, (b) a comprehensive reference grammar, well illustrated by contemporary examples, and (c) a students' dictionary. Here in Chicago we have been working on various kinds of teaching materials which are being used and tested in our classes. Of these, An Introduction to Tamil, Intermediate Tamil Conversations, and A Tamil Newspaper Reader may be mentioned.

OBJECTIVE

The present project addresses itself to the second need, i.e., a comprehensive reference grammar based on the results of recent linguistic theory and analytic techniques, yet accessible to any student of Tamil. The Dravidian language family is excellently represented by Tamil, the most ancient of the literary languages. A full description on the scale we are attempting would be valuable to linguists interested in general, Indian, and Dravidian linguistics.

PROCEDURE

1. The first step was to prepare a working bibliography of all the relevant materials like grammars of missionaries, articles in learned journals, and texts in print and on tape.

2. Then we excerpted large texts from several contemporary writers representing different stylistic resources of the language, and filed over 10,000 Tamil sentences in several copies. The filed sentences were then classified under tentative analytic categories like noun phrases, sentence types, verb classes, post-positions, cases, etc. These files, and the native knowledge of three Tamil speakers

from three different areas of the Tamil region, were quarried for data.

3. As the last step of Phase One, the present investigator and Mr. E. Annamalai wrote up studies of Tamil phonology and Tamil grammar, after extensive analysis.

RESULTS

The studies which have resulted from Phase One are strictly preliminary to a larger study of the Tamil language. In the phonology section (Part I) we describe the segmental phonology of two dialects, the Standard Colloquial and a Brahmin caste-dialect of Madras. Standard Colloquial Tamil (SCT) is, by and large, unmarked for caste and region, though it has a Madurai upper-class non-Brahmin dialect as the structural base for the standardization. The larger work would include a detailed discussion of the sociolinguistics of Tamil dialects. The segmental phonology is followed by a full discussion of sandhi, morphophonemics, and the relationships that obtain between the dialect phonologies and the traditional Tamil writing system. Our later work will fully explore the implications of the last section.

A table of contents is appended for information regarding further details and the sequence of the present work.

The linguistic discussions throughout have been as non-technical as the complexities of our new explorations would allow; some of the latest approaches to language (as developed by Roman Jakobson and Noam Chomsky) are implied by our techniques of analysis.

Later versions of this grammar will include a generative syntax which would utilize and unify the details of the present chapters. The preliminary studies presented here will be recast and integrated with the new materials. As said earlier, there will be extensive new systemic discussions of Tamil sociolinguistics, dialectology, relationships of written and spoken styles, as well as Tamil/English contrastive analyses relevant to the teaching of Tamil to English speakers.

Thus we might confidently say that Phase One has laid the necessary foundations, and gathered ample data as well as new insights, for the next phase of the comprehensive grammar for Tamil.

PRELIMINARY STUDIES FOR A REFERENCE GRAMMAR OF TAMIL

Table of Contents

PART I: PHONOLOGY

1.0.	Standard Colloquial Tamil	Page 1
1.1.	Vowels	1
1.2.	Consonants	13
2.0.	A Brahmin Dialect	33
2.1.	Vowels	36
2.2.	Consonants	51
3.0.	Structure	57
3.1.	Syllabic Structure	57
3.2.	Consonant Clusters in Written Tamil	60
3.3.	Clusters in Spoken Tamil	76
4.0.	Sandhi	81
4.1.	Sandhi in Written Tamil	81
4.2.	External Sandhi	81
4.3.	Internal Sandhi	100
5.0.	Morphophonemics (SCT)	116
6.0.	Phonology and the Tamil Writing System	127
6.1.	The Writing System	127
6.2.	The Status of t	127
6.3.	The Writing System Compared with the Colloquial System	132
6.4.	Non-Native Contrasts	134
6.5.	Over-Differentiation: Nasals	139
6.6.	Morphophonemic Uses of the Writing-Based Transcription	140
6.7.	The W-System as A Diasystem	142
6.8.	Summary	143

PART II: GRAMMAR

1.0.	The Verb System: Finite Form	Page 145
1.1.	Finite Forms: Simple Positive	145
1.2.	Finite Forms: Simple Negative	151
1.3.	Modals	152
1.4.	Voice	157
1.5.	Aspect	158
1.6.	The Verb System: Non-Finite Forms	164
2.0.	The Noun: Cases	169
2.1.	Oblique Forms	169
2.2.	Accusative Case	171
2.3.	Sociative Case	176
2.4.	Instrumental Case	178
2.5.	Attributive or Genitive	181
2.6.	Locative Case	185
2.7.	Directional or Ablative	191
2.8.	Dative Case	195
3.0.	Postpositions	201
3.1.	Postposition Classes	201
4.0.	The Person-Gender System	215
4.1.	The Categories	215
4.2.	The Forms	217
4.3.	Concord	218
5.0.	The Honorific System	224
5.1.	General	224
5.2.	Addressee-honorifics	224
5.3.	Referent Honorifics	229